

nineteenth-century England. It is likely that he found himself, when halfway through the second of his series, already weary of the project—already aware of the obvious repetition, the unavoidable monotony.

It is hard to come to final terms with Monsman's 1980 book. I find it difficult to summarize, to state its burden, still more to criticize: it is delicate, subtle, and stimulating, but also hesitant and evasive. Denis Donoghue has called his perceptive review of it (in the *New York Review of Books* for May 14, 1981) "Hide and Seek"—though presumably applying that phrase not only to Monsman but (quite justly) also to Pater. What, finally, does Monsman think of Pater? Does he like him? or admire him? identify with him? I can't say. As for Pater, did his Marius cease being an Epicurean, and become something else, or just (as the central chapter of the novel, "Second Thoughts," suggests) refine upon his hedonism, distinguishing between lower (sensual) and higher (intellectual) pleasure? Did Pater himself, who had been, like Ruskin, one of those boys who play at being priests; who had then a period of mocking disbelief (as one can learn from Thomas Wright's 1908 life of Pater); did he then return to the Church? He did aesthetically, certainly, but did he intellectually, and in faith? What does Monsman think?

Pater's own writings, for which Monsman offers a provocative (as well as elusive) approval, have left me with very mixed and conflicting feelings. I cannot doubt, however, that he is a strangely impressive writer in his low-pitched, slow, languid insistence. For the English-speaking (or reading) world, he remains the unique aesthete. His own derivations are almost entirely Continental—Winckelmann, Goethe, Heine, Baudelaire, Gautier, Hugo. Though English, Pater was extraordinarily uncompromising. If, in the latter part of his not long life (he died at 55), he softened the expression of views generally offensive, yet he never recanted. He is a hero of vocal passivity and articulate spectatorship.

Concelebration of Verities

The Home Place: A Memory and a Celebration, by Robert Drake, *Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1980. xiii + 161 pp. \$13.95.*

READERS OF *Modern Age* are already familiar with portions of Robert Drake's *The Home Place* through the appearance of certain of its chapters in the pages of this journal. Among these are "The Home Place," "The Grace of God at Maple Grove Methodist Church," and "King Lear at Maple Grove." As is generally true, however, one cannot gain a full appreciation of what an author is about by reading snippets here and there, and that is so whether the work at hand is tightly constructed or not. This particular book, at any rate, illustrates well the axiom about the whole being more than the sum of its parts. And it is an impressive whole indeed.

Among its manifold virtues is that it evinces a striking intellectual courage in even attempting to recollect, evaluate, and above all celebrate a portion of the past. The past here is that which is embodied in the author's West Tennessee ancestors and his more immediate family, their joys, griefs, loves, foibles, their storytelling, in short the substance of their lives. Put that way, in a neat series of abstractions, the objects of the author's recollections would seem quite colorless—and indeed the family is admittedly of no great historical importance—but Drake manages to work a word magic on his material that enlivens and commends it beyond what one would have supposed possible. The effort is a courageous one because in an age as hurried and harried as this, a writer runs the risk of being charged with sentimentalism, escapism, nostalgia, or some such, simply by committing the indiscretion of suggesting that the past is not entirely dead and that it might have something significant to tell us. It is clear that Drake is not about to be intimidated by the possibility of such stock criticism.

Of course it is true that a writer runs the

risk of indulging in sentimentality in such a personal backward-looking book as this. It is a pitfall that Drake manages to avoid with entire success. Like Andrew Lytle in his *A Wake for the Living: A Family Chronicle* (a title which suggests, incidentally, that it is some of those in the present who are really the dead) the present author has such an engaging style—supple, witty, allusive—along with a sense of history and of self that he never even comes close to being maudlin. Having suggested an affinity between this volume and Lytle's, I should perhaps observe that if Drake's is not so wise a book as his predecessor's, it nevertheless holds up very well in such a comparison. Reading Drake's chroniclings and his musings upon them in book form, one momentarily thinks that he is too young a man to be writing such a book in the first place. But on reflection such a cavil is seen for what it is against the book's solid achievement, its articulation of knowledge carried to the heart, a wisdom essentially unrelated to the author's chronological years.

A clue to the source of this quality, this wisdom, may be found in a passage of the book itself. If Drake seems knowing beyond his age, it is in part because he is, as he says, a product of "older" parents, and he grew up listening to old people talk and tell stories and came to find it more comfortable to be around them than his contemporaries. More important as influence than that, however (though related), is the attitude toward history that he inherited from his ancestors. For history was to them something that "inevitably shaped and defined the individual and his perceptions of the world." And that not in a negative way at all, for such an attitude helped them to know the world's body and to be "at home there."

Along with the sense of history came, more importantly still, the attitude of piety, a piety toward one's ancestors, the home place and the way of life it represented, toward the mystery of Being, toward God. Drake readily admits that he was not born with this *pietas*. None of us is, of course; it has to be carefully developed

in time. And for Drake, as for most of us, it comes paradoxically only after we have responded to the impulse to test the larger reality beyond home and village. Only in making the odyssey out and back do the verities of home and heart reveal themselves fully, though they were there all along. What is more, the stories and meditations which comprise this book are not only in themselves acts of homage to a certain time, place, and people who lived in them but are in fact the means by which the author discovered their full significance, something he could not, perhaps, have done in any other way.

Some will doubtless find this sort of thing to be a matter of what is conventionally called "conventional wisdom." And quite literally it is that: wisdom on which people can "come together" and by virtue of which they can live a common life in one dear perpetual place. But there is hardly a passage in the book, I think, where Drake lapses into mere platitude. Witness, for instance, this fine passage in which he states his own late-won understanding of his ancestors' uses of the past, especially as seen in their love of storytelling and in the stories themselves: "Gradually, I began to see that their seeming retreats into a past I could never enter were not just attempts at quixotic escapism but, rather, journeys that they found perpetually refreshing and renewing because these forays brought them into touch with what had been the real source of strength, the real inspiration of their lives: the home place and all that went with it." Drake admits that the past they commemorated was doomed—do not all times eventually pass?—and that he early on felt quite shut off from it, but neither fact keeps him, nor should keep us, from celebrating what is good in it or from using it to take the measure of our present social, spiritual disorders.

I have spoken of a wisdom beyond the author's years, but there is a maturity of a different order that is evidenced here that certainly bears noting, an artistic sophistication. I refer specifically to the author's practice of the narrative art. I must confess

that I did not expect so exquisite a book as this from the author of *Amazing Grace*, which though finely wrought borders on the merely pleasant in comparison to the present volume. There are a number of chapters and individual passages which could be used to illustrate my point, but none stands out more than those two chapters on the author's mother and her gradual decline into physical and mental illness. Here, even more than in treating of a distant, golden past, the dangers, real or imagined, of sentimentality, the indulgence in an embarrassing pity, loom large. Or I should say that that is one extreme. The other extreme would be a rendering of the decline in so objective and impersonal a fashion as to reduce it to insignificance. Drake does not veer to either extreme but hews to the hard middle ground and manages to achieve a truly masterful piece of writing.

The two pertinent chapters are "The Little Girl with the Blue Eyes" and "A Christmas Visit." In the first of these the author points out that over the years his mother became more and more possessive of him, especially after his father's death, a fact that produced the predictable response of his becoming increasingly detached from her. There is nothing callous about his part in this; there is, rather, evidence of an intense emotional struggle: "Perhaps I was still afraid of the blue eyes that belonged to the little girl in the photograph with their terrible, defenseless need for love and yet their terrible strength in such weakness." But it is the second of these chapters, "A Christmas Visit," which shows Drake at his best. It is a fully realized instance of the narrative craft, the sort of thing one expects to find only in first-rate fiction, and then infrequently. And in fact the chapter opens, in a departure from anything else in the book, with an objective rendering of scene, mood, and character as if it were a first-person short story: "I think of *King Lear* and the color white—the color of age and winter, the color of despair. I sit in the waiting room after the receptionist has telephoned the 'senile ward' that my pa-

tient has visitors, and I watch them drift by, the men in rumpled work clothes, the women in untidy cotton dresses." What accounts in part for the power, the resonance, here and elsewhere, I think, is on the one hand the forceful rendering of the details of life on the ward—his mother's appearance, with her eyes fallen from blue, the bits of dialogue and monologue, the physical circumstances—and on the other the seemingly dispassionate analysis of the situation and the poignant insight it yields. As an instance of the latter consider the following passage: "I think: my mother is the object of charity, of philanthropy, however well meant; and I find that almost unbearable. Who would ever have thought it would come to this? But then what are the alternatives? There are none and I know it; for I have been through all that before." If the writing in this chapter is less than genuinely great—and I am not prepared to concede that it is—then it is only because of the chapter's relative brevity. However that may be, its power is finally not a matter of technique, of craft, but of sensibility and character.

On a lower plane, mention at least should be made of another quality of the author's handling of his material. I refer in particular to the numerous epigrammatic commentaries on people and circumstances scattered here and there. One example will suffice to illustrate: "All good talkers are good listeners; that is the way they perfect and refine their own art. On the other hand, bores never listen to anybody; that is why they are bores." That Drake comes by this epigrammatic gift honestly is evident from the son's reporting of his father's bons mots. One of these was occasioned by someone's asking the senior Drake just how much a recently deceased townsman had left. "He left it *all*," came the quick reply.

This book has many other fine features—among which are its photographs, which, though not great works of that art, nevertheless have a significant story to tell, too—but finally it is Drake's superb storytelling gift that must be commended above the rest. One of my favorite

stories is that about the time Pa Drake (the author's grandfather) went to Memphis for a Confederate veterans' reunion with a Mr. Buchanan and Uncle Jack, his black body servant and also a veteran. On hearing an objection to Uncle Jack's staying in the same room with the white men, Pa Drake said that if Uncle Jack could not stay then neither would he. The story is not merely amusing, of course, but illustrates well the peculiar intimacy that could exist between blacks and whites despite the official barriers. Drake came by his gift for storytelling honestly, too, not only from his father but from more distant kin as well, some of whom, I suspect, are heart rather than blood relations. From being a boy who was generally bored by hearing the same tales told again and again, and then a young man who eventually came to appreciate them—"The old tales were not being told...because they were new but because they were good"—Drake has over the years

become one amongst them, one who not only loves the stories but who publicly celebrates them and the life they embody through his own consummate practice of the ancient art.

We are fortunate to have such a book as this. I only wonder how many more of its kind it will be possible for writers younger than Drake, or those not yet born, to give us in years to come. In an age given increasingly over to a variety of moral, spiritual, and intellectual confusions—all enemies of the permanent things—the prospects are not particularly heartening. *The Home Place*, however, must provide cause for some little hope at least: hope, that is, that there are those who, encouraged by Drake's example, will not only pass those dragons by the high (and low) ways of the modern world but will also go to the Father of souls, singing, like him, on their way.

Reviewed by THOMAS HUBERT

Ethnicity and Radicalism

The Radical Persuasion, 1890-1917, by
Aileen S. Kraditor, *Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1981. viii + 381 pp. \$12.95.*

AILEEN S. KRADITOR, a leading historian of American reform movements, gained much of her professional reputation by writing about the suffragists. Feminist intellectuals have been among those most conspicuous in praising her studies of the suffragists' ideas and organizational strategies. For example, the current president of the Organization of American Historians, an embattled feminist, Gerda Lerner, considers Professor Kraditor a pioneer in the field of women's history. Ironically, the person so designated scorns "women's historians" for politicizing her craft. Moreover, she devotes her most recent preface to *The Ideas of the Women's Suffrage Movement* to fending off unwell-

come admirers. Although a Marxist-Leninist at the time she worked on the suffragists, she has since then moved steadily toward the Right, finally co-founding last year *Continuity*, an avowedly conservative historical periodical.

Her newest monograph contains statements and interpretations which dramatically underline her own breaking of ranks. From one perspective the entire work may be read as an extended case-history of how radicals have misinterpreted the American past. She faults leftist historians who divide American social and cultural groups into defenders and opponents of what they call the System. In their view, those with definable material interests must take a stand for or against American industrial capitalism—and for or against what are alleged to be its supportive religious and political institutions. Studying immigrant communities that produced factory workers, radical historians have stressed only one aspect of their social